

IN THE CLAIMS:

1-57. (Canceled)

58. (Currently Amended) A method for removing intervertebral disc material, comprising the steps of:

creating a working channel from a patient's skin to an intervertebral disc space;

positioning a protector near an entrance into said intervertebral disc space between a brush member and at least one of neural tissue, dura tissue, and vasculature adjacent to said entrance, said protector having a longitudinal axis and including a retractor having at least two blade members for establishing a barrier between said brush member and said body tissue adjacent to said entrance, said blade members having a generally rectangular planar shape, said blade members positioned in a co-planar orientation relative to said longitudinal axis of said protector;

inserting said brush member into said intervertebral disc space, said brush member having a length ranging from 0.25 to 4.0 inches, a diameter ranging from 0.082 to 1.225 inches, and a plurality of bristle members disposed in a helical configuration defining a capacity for carrying intervertebral disc material;

manipulating said brush member within said intervertebral disc space to receive intervertebral disc material within said brush member; and

removing said brush member from said intervertebral disc space.

59. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 58, wherein said step of creating a working channel to the intervertebral disc space is accomplished via at least one of percutaneous surgical procedure and an open surgical procedure.

60. (Canceled)

61. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~60~~ 58, wherein said protector further

- comprises a cannula dimensioned to extend to said entrance of said intervertebral disc space, said cannula having an inner lumen dimensioned to slideably receive said brush member for passage into said intervertebral disc space.
62. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 58, wherein said brush member includes a stem member, and further including the step of providing a drive assembly capable of engaging with said stem member for manipulating said brush member within said intervertebral disc space.
63. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 62, wherein said drive assembly comprises one of a powered drive assembly coupled to said stem member and a manual drive assembly coupled to said stem member.
64. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 63, wherein said powered drive assembly is a power drill.
65. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 63, wherein said manual drive assembly includes a handle member capable of being coupled to said stem member.
66. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 65, wherein said manual drive assembly includes an extension member coupled to said handle and a quick-connect coupling assembly for releasable connection to said stem member.
67. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 63, wherein said drive assembly includes a stop member coupled to said stem member for controlling the depth to which said brush member can be advanced into said intervertebral disc space.
68. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 61, wherein said cannula includes a lip member at a distal end thereof dimensioned to retract at least one of said neural tissue,

dura tissue, and vasculature adjacent to said spine.

69. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 61, wherein said inner lumen of said cannula and said brush member have approximately the same cross-sectional shape.
70. (Canceled)
71. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~70~~ 58, wherein ~~said body tissue adjacent to said entrance includes at least one of neural tissue and dura tissue of the spine, and wherein~~ said at least two blade members of said retractor includes a first blade member for retracting said neural tissue and a second blade member for retracting said dura tissue.
72. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 71, wherein said first blade member and second blade member have a fixed angle therebetween.
73. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 71, wherein said first blade member and second blade member have a variable angle therebetween.
74. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 73, wherein said retractor includes a handle assembly for varying said angle between said first blade member and said second blade member.